BUSINESS ALMOST AS USUAL

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them, often claiming their purchases on the spot and standing by until they were packed and labeled, so that there would be no danger of their going to anyone else. In the grocery-and-meat department, business was reduced to simple village marketing. Selfridge buyers went to the Covent Garden and other large produce markets at four A.M. and competed with hundreds of other buyers for the scanty lots of vegetables and meat. It was not infrequent that the entire morning's purchases could be packed into a basket and hauled to the store in a taxicab. Rationing, which covered 40 per cent of the store's sales, plus the wholesale evacuation of London, aided in solving the problem of personnel by reducing the total volume of business by more than 50 per cent.

Reserves accumulated before the war enabled the store to keep its shelves fairly well laden during the first months of war, and prewar commitments with manufacturers gave it certain priorities. It also enjoyed the advantage of being a big institution, because when scarcities became serious it was in the interest of manufacturers to keep their goods on display in the big stores rather than to attempt any kind of equal distribution. *Advertisements for second-hand pianos and furniture* helped to keep those departments stocked. Obituaries were carefully investigated, in case the deceased had possessions which would be sold, or a wine cellar that could be bought up. A newspaper insertion announcing that men who had received razors as gifts and didn't like them could sell them to Selfridge's, for the full purchase price, brought in hundreds of them; and similar advertisements resulted in numerous books, albums and trinkets of all kinds being returned. "At one time we thought of just hanging up a sign and turning ourselves into a ruddy pawnshop," the director of merchandise remarked. As the war rounded off its first year, it became a commonplace occurrence for directors, floor managers and senior clerks to arrive at the store carrying wall clocks, lamp shades or even a brace of ducks. Each was doing his part to keep the shelves of Selfridge's stocked.

"What article that you can't get is in greatest demand?" I asked a floor manager as we walked through the different merchandise departments.

"Oh, fountain pens," he replied like a flash. "You don't happen to have one you would like to sell, do you?"

Fish That Deserve Their Name

He laughed at his own question, but I noticed that his eye went to my coat pocket. Another nonexistent article in great demand is harmonicas. "They all came from Germany," he said, "and it seems that no one thought to stock up on them. Every soldier and sailor wants one. We could sell a million."

We passed a few goldfish in an aquarium. *They were priced at one* pound, five shillings each.

"Who on earth buys goldfish these days?" I asked.

"You'd be surprised at the demand," the manager replied. "A man walked in here just yesterday and paid forty pounds for a fancy aquarium and the goldfish. It's things like that that they seem to want."

The signs of war were evident on every floor, not only in walls stained and cracked from bombs, fire and water, and windows covered with a special wire and transparent-paper material, but also in the quality of the goods on the shelves and scarcity of articles that were formerly abundant.

"We wouldn't have carried this quality before the war," the manager remarked, pointing to rolls of drapery material that was advertised as "light-proof." The electrical-appliances department was virtually empty, and the kitchen-service department would have had difficulty in supplying an average kitchen.

"Sorry, we have no more frying pans, but you might use this baking pan for *frying*," I overheard a saleslgirl say to a customer.

When Jill Comes Marching Home

The foreign-book-and-magazine department had been all but discontinued. One table contained hundreds of shop-worn books entitled Edward VIII, Our King, costing two shillings, sixpence.

"They wouldn't sell in peacetime, but now they're going fast," the manager remarked.

Small signs announced that jewelry *and clocks would not be repaired*, as the store had lost its repair staff, but that old gold and silver would be bought. Leather goods, playing cards and business equipment were extremely scarce, but counters were piled high with soap and toilet articles. The women's hairdressing salon was jinging with feverish activity, and several dozen young girls in the uniforms of the different military services sat waiting.

"They have a hard time with their hair at the stations and gun sites," the supervisor, a tall blond woman dressed in white, said, "and *they* come here first when they get leave. Our tidy high coiffure for wearing with uniform caps is very popular."

The clothing department had posted notices advertising "utility clothing," which the manager described as standardized clothes designed to save material and labor. Women's tweed suits were cut with pleated, but not full, skirts, and the coats were rather short. I could see no difference in utility men's suits costing between seven and eight pounds, but the manager pointed out savings in the lining and in finishing – two buttons on the sleeve instead of four, and no vests with double-breasted suits. On the whole, the suits seemed to have better lines and workmanship than a standard ready-made suit in New York.

Many of the store speculations on war demands had not been borne out. Assuming that it would introduce a utilitarian era in English living, Selfridge's acquired garden tools, seeds, beekeeping equipment, utensils and jars for home canning, and home cobbler outfits. On the other hand, the *stocks of evening clothes*, brocaded dressing gowns and fine lingerie were permitted to run down, on the assumption that there would be no demand for them. The store still has its utilitarian equipment piled up in out-of-the-way corners, but the demand for evening gowns and fine bathrobes has been constant. Another error in judgment was committed when war and fire-fighting equipment was stocked. The people were simply not interested in asbestos

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